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BISON AND ELK HERDS INCREASE IN ALASKA

Aerial and ground surveys of Alaska's transplanted bison and elk reveal that the wild herds have thrived on their new ranges in the Territory, the Fish and Wildlife Service announced today. But their present ranges are becoming overbrowsed, the Service said.

Service biologists reported that the bison herd now numbers 325 animals; the elk herd, 211. Both species were transplanted in Alaska in 1928, when 23 bison from the National Bison Range, Montana, were brought to the Big Delta region, near Fairbanks; and eight elk from Washington were settled for the winter on Kodiak Island's Kalsin Bay. The elk were transferred to nearby Afognak Island the next spring.

The surveys were made in December to determine the rate of increase of the animals, the range conditions, the effects of predation, and similar factors.

The bison have not strayed much from the area in which they were originally planted, the surveys showed. Areas in which forage is extremely sparse separate the original bison range in the Big Delta region from other suitable habitat.

Because their range is becoming overbrowsed, the Service plans to transfer some of the bison herd to the upper reaches of the Copper River watershed. This area abounds in the grasses and sedges on which bison feed.

The Afognak Island elk herd is still concentrated within a short distance of where they were originally stocked, according to the survey. The elk have also seriously overbrowsed their range, and now need new wintering grounds. Plans are underway to transplant surplus animals to unoccupied territory.

Bison and elk were unknown in Alaska before the 1928 stockings. The big game census of 1946 disclosed 5,000 bison in the United States. Practically all were on the National Bison Range, Montana, and the Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming. More than 10,000 bison are in Canada. Almost 300,000 elk were reported in the United States, chiefly in Wyoming, Colorado, Montana, and Idaho.

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